

THE MIND'S DEDICATION TO SURVIVAL

WERNER ERHARD

EST Institute, San Francisco

GILBERT GUERIN AND ROBERT SHAW

University of California, Berkeley

Some 22,000 people have gone through Erhard Seminars Training (*est*) since its inception in 1971. The training consists of two week-ends, totals between 50 and 60 hours and includes 225 participants. The training activities are designed to provide the participants with the opportunity to look at their behavior and experience in a new way and to incorporate their discoveries into their everyday lives.

In 1974 training seminars have been held in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Honolulu, New York and Aspen. The sessions are most frequently conducted by a single leader and several assistants. The participants in most groups represent a broad spectrum of occupations and ages; there have also been special EST groups for children, teenagers, prisoners and medical staffs.

The purpose of this report is to discuss some observations and conclusions relative to the mind's dedication to survival, a central theoretical concept in the EST training. Terminology will be common to that used in Western philosophy and Eastern thought, free from any special jargon and therefore in keeping with the style of an Adlerian journal.

EXPERIENCE

It is useful, at least for the purpose of description, to separate what are commonly described as mental activities into two groups of activities (one mental and one only apparently mental) which are dominant features in man's existence. There are first, automatic, stimulus-response activities which come from the "mind" of the individual. The second group of activities are more purposeful and creative, and issue from the "being" or the source of an individual. An individual's sense of satisfaction, aliveness and sufficiency results chiefly from his recognition that he is the source of himself. In other words, his well-being is linked to his awareness of himself as a "being" rather than as a "mind."

The "mind" as defined in this article is the collection of records of experiences that the individual has perceived and stored. It is machine-like in that it records, orders and intermixes old experiences. Each record includes: (1) all the sensations, emotions, attitudes or mental states, behaviors, thoughts and fantasies or imaginations that combined to make up the experience; and (2) a kind of background "voice-over" which conceptualizes about the experience and decides based on these conceptualizations how to "be" in the future. Hence, an experience is recorded not as a single element but rather as a total of all the characteristics, behaviors and attitudes, including the emotional components. Ansbacher (1973, p. 135) has written in a similar vein about recollection: "recollection is . . . how he typically acts and faces the future, and that he carries this picture with him as a memento or warning from his childhood, for future action."

Individuals go through their lives ordering, analyzing and explaining the events they perceive. Organizing principles emerge out of decisions and rationalizations made during early experiences and become the future explanations for one's history. These then determine how principal events are perceived, identified, interpreted and reacted to. This organizational aspect of the mind stimulates, sets perceptions and determines understandings of new events, a characteristic that was identified by both Alfred Adler and Jerome S. Bruner (Adler, 1956, p. 210). Once initiated, this process is automatic and machine-like even though, at times, it appears to be animated and full of excitement.

POINT OF VIEW

Each individual's uniquely organized pattern and content of mind is his "point of view." In other words his particular organization and content is the place from which he views the world. The mind can be said to be a "point of view" about everything. The concept of "point of view" is similar to that of "life style" in Adlerian theory. (Adler, 1929; Hall, 1957; Mosak, 1973.)

It is the individual's particular organization of and rationalizations about his previous actions, feelings and thoughts that provide him with an identity—an identity locked in the past and tied to the effect of experience. The alternative, of course, is to be able to be aware of the present, to recognize oneself as the cause of experience and to have aliveness. This is a function of detaching oneself from that with which the individual has identified himself. To do this he

needs only to be aware of himself as the source of that with which he previously identified. However, ongoing accumulations of experiences, each organized along previous patterns loom so large that many people act with an identity that is a monument to the past. The individual comes to view himself and his life as the result of what has happened. This "point of view" gives the individual the illusion that he "knows" why events occur and the "whys" almost always are seen as existing outside the control of the individual.

On the other hand a second function, that of "being," is based on the reality of the moment of existence. It is this concept that parallels the "creative self" that Adler identified as an extension to life style (Hall, 1957). Being is observation, choice and creativity. Choice is that human activity that Adler discussed in 1931 (Mosak, 1973), in spite of then prevalent resistance to the idea. Creativity is a concept that Hall (1957, p. 124) describes as "Adler's crowning achievement as a personality theorist." It is aptly represented in Adler's statement "Do not forget the most important fact that not heredity and not environment are determining factors—both give only the frame and the influence which are answered by the individual in regard to his styled creative power." (Adler, 1956, p. ii).

Being is awareness, recognition and attention to the experience at hand. It is at the cause of experience rather than at the effect. It is to "be" something rather than to "have" or "do" something. The poetic experiences of love, health, happiness, self-expression, and satisfaction are but a few of the feeling-action descriptions that express the process of being. They define through abstraction what is actually experienced rather than a thought or concept of what is experienced.

MIND'S SURVIVAL

The very nature of the functions of mind and being is that as one dominates the other recedes. The point of view, once established, tends to perpetuate itself. If a point of view about oneself or others is threatened by new information, the records of the old experience, including the concepts, actions, justifications and rationalizations come into play, determine the current behavior and limit any sense of being. Adler (1929, p. 99) said that "In new situations, however where he is confronted with difficulties, the style of life appears clearly and distinctly."

Behavior based on prior experiences is evoked automatically, and the individual plays out his action with no awareness that he is simply repeating earlier patterns of behavior with those minor variations that make it appropriate to current conditions. In this way the mind function acts out a dedication to its own survival, a survival of what has already been stored and concluded.

It is the dominance of the mind function, the need to protect an identity rooted in past experience, that limits a person's satisfaction and sense of completion. For instance, an individual who views himself as an unhappy person will act to protect this point of view and, in order to be right (another function of the mind), will continue to be unhappy. The person as a mind or identity will justify, explain and find reasons to support his unhappiness. He will even find it righteous to be unhappy, and yet this activity will never bring the sense of satisfaction desired. His action will be grounded in the past, and it will deny him a full participation in the present.

EXAMPLES

Some of the common attitudes and activities associated with the protection of identity include the need to be right while making others wrong, the need to dominate the situation while reducing the effect of others, the need for self-justification that results in the invalidation of the ideas of others and the sense of self-righteousness that provides an illusion of survival. Self-righteousness, for example, can take various forms, such as the attitudes that "I am poorer than thou," "I'm more stupid than thou," and "I'm more tragic than thou." It generates a kind of reverse superiority.

These are patterns of behavior that most of us demonstrate in our daily lives. They are not necessarily the gross examples that have come to be associated with cases of neurotic or psychotic personalities. The "point of view" is a function that we all possess, and it is that aspect of our lives that limits our ability to be authentic, to create new experiences and to see life as it exists in the present. Patterns of behavior that are expressed in the need for success—or inferiority or superiority—can dominate an individual's life, as in the case of the neurotic, or can be found in the everyday games played by normal individuals. In each situation the persuasiveness of the point of view limits the individual's experience of aliveness and likewise affects the relationships he establishes.

The example of a person who develops an attitude of inferiority based on early experiences will serve to illustrate the mind's dedication to its own survival as well as demonstrate the resulting pattern of personal relationships. If early experiences have diminished a person's feelings about himself, he will tend to act out these feelings in subsequent behavior. Reinforcement may come from old interpretations of new interactions and he may come to expect or create further personal devaluation. Over time this pattern, this point of view, becomes more thoroughly substantiated and the individual assumes the identity of inferiority. The individual also develops reasons to explain his feelings and behavior and these help to defend him against any threat from situations that do not support his concept of personal inferiority. Within this context the mind is dominant and behavior is automatic no matter how well explained.

For the identity of inferiority to remain whole and right the activities of those who attempt to help will be perceived as wrong, just as those who attempt to criticize will be wrong. The helper will fail in his attempt to change the individual; the critic will receive blame as the source of negative feelings. The person with inferior feelings ultimately considers himself right because "It's the way things are," and "I can't help it." Each attitude is controlled or dominated by the condition of inferiority; a condition based on a point of view developed in the past and defended to protect a sense of identity.

While this is an exaggerated example, it expresses the model for everyday situations in many of our lives. It demonstrates the purpose and methods involved in the way we deal with disagreeable situations, differences of opinion, upsets with others, disappointments and unfulfilled expectations and the infinite variety of circumstances perceived as threats to our personal identity. This identity is at odds with a clear perception of the present, with an acknowledgment of responsibility and a personal sense of aliveness and satisfaction. In the latter respect, inferiority and superiority are as Adler pointed out "on the useless side" (1929, p. 89).

TRAINING

The process used in EST training is designed to assist the individual to experience life with less automated, patterned and repetitive behavior. The goal is to increase the individual's awareness of his present experience with satisfaction and aliveness. Three

steps are involved in assisting the individual to move from the static position of an existence based on mind functions (identity) to an active participation based on the function of being.

In the first step the person is given the opportunity to recognize the automatic nature of his behavior: he is brought to an awareness of the repetitive and mechanical quality of his feelings, thoughts and behavior based on past experience. As the person develops a recognition of mechanical ways of living, he can realize that he has acquired these patterns rather than that he *is* these patterns. "I am high strung," "I am ill tempered," "I am thoughtful," "I am considerate," all illustrate common instances of identification with patterns rather than acknowledgement of the possession of patterns, habits or characteristic responses. As soon as the person knows that he habitually responds to certain stimuli in a stereotypic manner, he begins to move to the next step.

In the second step the person learns about the motivation and "payoff" behind the maintenance of patterns of behavior. This is not an easy step. Adler (1956, p. 333) in his reference to the treatment of the neurotic has defined the individual's defense of his thoughts and behavior as a "primitive" scheme of protection that evaluates perceptions as "above-below, victor-vanquished, masculine-feminine, nothing-everything, etc." Even in the "normal" person realizations do not come easily because: (1) all the protective devices such as reasoning, justification and explanations come into play as soon as the individual tries to "look at" his behavior, and (2) responsibility for the behavior is usually projected and externalized, with the result that the person perceives himself as the victim of circumstances, background, or the overwhelming forces of life. The acceptance of personal responsibility for one's life can come slowly and it is essential to freeing the individual from the automatic behavior that limits his sense of being.

In the final step the person discovers that the ultimate cost of protecting his identity, of maintaining a point of view, of having the payoff, is the loss of the experience of love, health, intimacy and zest for life. The true cost of his attachment to his point of view and compulsion for the survival of the mind is the loss of aliveness. As the person begins to take responsibility for the patterns of his behavior that have functioned automatically as repetitive actions of the past, he begins to recognize that his fixed point of view limits his ability to experience what is true, as well as the richness and joy of life.

DISCUSSION

The EST process is designed to assist the participant to discover through experience, rather than analysis, aspects of his mental functioning and behavior. The participant "looks at" (without explanation or rationalization) his behavior, feelings, thoughts, history, justifications and the concomitant payoffs. The realization that previously unrecognized payoffs of apparently negative behavior cause the negative behavior to persist occurs here. For example, the person may come to experience the self-justification and righteousness that can occur when he is blocked, "put down" or dominated. As he gets a glimpse of what the mind has accepted as the payoff of these feelings, he gradually becomes aware of the patterns he uses to assert power and control in this situation. He now has the opportunity to see how this behavior allows him to feel "right" while it allows him to make others "wrong." He discovers how these old patterns and acts of domination reduce his aliveness and result in perpetuation of unhappiness and discontent.

REFERENCES

- ADLER, A. *The science of living*. Garden City, New York: Greenberg Publishers, 1929.
- ADLER, A. *The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler*, H. Ansbacher & R. Ansbacher (Eds.). New York: Basic Books, 1956.
- ANSBACHER, H. Adler's interpretation of early recollections: historical account. *Journal of Individual Psychology*, 1973, 29, 135-145.
- HALL, C., & LINDZEY, G. *Theories of personality*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1957.
- MOSAK, H. H., & DREIKURS, R. Adlerian Psychotherapy. In R. J. Corsini, (Ed.), *Current psychotherapies*. Itasca, Illinois: F. E. Peacock Publishers, 1973.
- WOLMAN, B. B. *Contemporary theories and systems in psychology*. New York: Harper & Row, 1960.

WERNER ERHARD is the founder of *est*, an educational corporation started in 1971, located at 1750 Union St., San Francisco, Ca., 94123. His professional experience has been in the field of business management and executive development. From 1963 to 1971 he was associated with Parents Magazine's Cultural Institute, serving as its vice-president during the last four years.

GILBERT GUERIN, Ph.D. is the Coordinator of Research in Special Education at the University of California, Berkeley and the Director of Pupil Personnel Services for Novato Unified Schools.

ROBERT SHAW, M.D. is a child and family psychiatrist. He directs the Family Youth and Children's Mental Health Services for the City of Berkeley and is co-director of the Family Institute.